

The Builder.

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W E last week alluded to the irresponsible and injurious alterations which have been made in the proposed new Metropolitan Building-Act. Why this very condemnable conduct should still be pursued we are at a total loss to conceive; for if through misfortune they should be enacted, they must and will most certainly be of necessity as soon corrected. We, therefore, beg to advise the party, whoever he is, who causes this mischief, and so sets himself in opposition to experience and *bona fide* advice, to retreat in time, and not to so endanger a measure which is looked forward to with anticipations of beneficial working; to give up at once any view which would endanger the measure, and cease to irritate the building profession of London to continual outcries against the policy and good effect of that which all desire to see perfected. At present there is sad complaint, that as soon as one hole is mended another is made, and that a vast increase of trouble, expense, and anxiety is thrown upon the several interests and organs of our practical metropolitan architecture, and in fact, that however near the measure may be to consummation, there are still, from time to time, lodged in it fresh matters of irritation, and a vast new consumption of time and expense is the consequent result.

In Sec. 77 exists a great practical defect, through the allowance, in the case of new buildings, before survey and payment of the fees, of a month to elapse, and fourteen days to elapse in like manner in the case of additions, alterations, or repairs: the qualifying words, "*covered in, and all the walls thereof have been built to their full height,*" will be taken advantage of by builders of low rank, as similar provisions under the present Act have often been, such persons both evading compliance with the statutory restrictions, and payment of the fees, by means of leaving off a few slates, tiles, or bricks, so as to answer every summons by the words, "*The building is not yet finished; when it is finished, the provisions of the Act will be fulfilled, and the fees will be paid.*"

Stronger powers are required to compel compliance with the statute, in cases where buildings have been begun without notice.

We have received many humane suggestions relative to the preservation of buildings from the ravages of fire, the most obvious of which is the diminution of the quantity of combustible materials. We therefore urge most strongly upon the Legislature, that whereas thick walls, with timber in them, become no better than thin walls without it, and, in fact, often have

the effect of rendering buildings as dangerous as if destitute of party-walls,—that every encouragement should be given to safe and economical building, by the allowance of all external walls which are otherwise required to be as much as a brick-and-a-half thick, to be half a brick thinner, provided they have no wood therein; and all party-walls which would otherwise be two bricks thick, to be half a brick thinner, provided they also have no timber in them.

At the present price of iron in England, five tiers of wrought vat-hooping band may be used for the same outlay as one tier of fir bond-timber, with the advantage of continuous chain across flues, and in the joints, without the slightest severance of the work.

We insert the following remarks made in a letter by Dr. Benjamin Franklin, upon the subject of combustible buildings and their improvement:—

"It appears to me of great importance to build our dwelling-houses, if we can, in a manner more secure from danger by fire. We scarcely ever hear of fire in Paris. When I was there, I took particular notice of the construction of their houses, and I did not see how one of them could well be burnt. The roofs are slate or tile, the walls are stone, the rooms generally lined with stucco or plaster, instead of wainscot, the floors of stucco, or of six-square tiles painted brown, or of flag-stone, or of marble; if any floors were of wood, it was of oak wood, which is not so inflammable as pine. Carpets prevent the coldness of the stone or brick floors offending the feet in winter, and the noise of treading on such floors, over-head, is less inconvenient than on boards. The stairs too, at Paris, are either stone or brick, with only a wooden edge or corner for the step; so that, on the whole, though the Parisians commonly burn wood in their chimneys, a more dangerous kind of fuel than that used here, yet their houses escape extremely well, as there is little in a room that can be consumed by fire except the furniture; whereas in London, perhaps scarcely a year passes in which half a million of property and many lives are not lost by this destructive element. Of late, indeed, they begin here to leave off wainscoting their rooms, and instead of it cover the walls with stucco, often formed into panels, like wainscot, which being painted, is very strong and warm. Stone staircases, too, with iron rails, grow more and more into fashion here. But stone steps cannot in some circumstances be fixed; and there methinks oak is safer than pine; and I assure you that in many genteel houses here, both old and new, the stairs and floors are oak, and look extremely well. Perhaps solid oak for the steps would be still safer than boards; and two steps might be cut diagonally out of one piece. Excuse my talking to you on a subject with which you must be so much better acquainted than I am; it is partly to make out a letter, and partly in hope that, by turning your attention to the point, some methods of greater security in our future building may be thought of and promoted by you, whose judgment I know has deservedly great weight with our fellow-citizens. For though our town has not hitherto suffered very greatly by fire, yet I am apprehensive that some time or other, by a concurrence of unlucky circumstances, such as dry weather, hard frost, and high winds, a fire then happening may suddenly spread far and wide over our cedar roofs, and do us immense mischief."

It has been suggested that water-closets, of proper construction, projecting from the rear or sides of buildings, should be legalized, on account of the hardship which at present lies against their erection; in spite of which, indeed, perhaps as many as fifty thousand have been erected within the metropolis, many of them secretly, without notice having been given to the district-surveyor, and many in violation of the present statute. A great many of these irregular buildings are not only built without walls, but many of them are composed entirely of wood, without even the resort to

the technical evasion of making them as "rooms if any in the roof thereof," or the pretence of rendering these pieces of building all roof without walling.

The restricting workshops, breweries, and distilleries, to thirty-five squares, must be injurious.

We must again urge that, from the low state of architectural construction as found in ordinary actual practice, we have our fears relative to the policy of placing a paramount superintendence over the works of eminent architects: few architects, of very great eminence, would accept such an office; and there would be very gross indecency in an inferior in experience, technical learning, and in-born ability, having conferred upon him the graceless office of spoiling his superior's work.

Few people know, especially members of the Legislature, the real state of the architectural constructive knowledge, as actually brought to bear upon ordinary practical building. While the proposed Act contains many obnoxious provisions, which could only annoy the subject, without, in the slightest degree, improving the soundness of building, or preventing the devastating effects of conflagration,—none of those grand, practical, subverting errors, which have crept into building, are forbidden, or in the slightest degree attempted to be counter-acted or discouraged.

Of all the practical abuses which have arisen, none has wrought a more extensive injury, none has lowered the characters of English building more than this wretched thing, which



profligate folly has substituted for sound arches upon geometrical principles. This error, which is a corruption entirely of modern growth, has, indeed, been lashed with all the severity which it deserves; but of what use is such denunciation, without amendment take place? In spite of all that has been said against so wilful and perverse a practice, which lays the metropolis in ruins, the evil still goes on. In the line of the very improvement from Long-acre to the British Museum, from whence many sound, well-built houses have been removed, we yesterday observed the carcass of a new house, which contains fifteen of these things, and ere fifteen months elapse, that building will be shivered by fifteen cracks. The same folly has been commenced along the line of the northward continuation of Farringdon-street: scarcely one-third of such mock arches have ever escaped fracture. The treasurer of one of our metropolitan hospitals, a few weeks ago, shewed us the same folly in a new lodge then building for the establishment. We pointed out the defect—that defect was denied—but a single fortnight shewed a fracture in the work over each aperture. The new buildings near Paddington church are nearly all so erected, and are nearly all in a state of severance. St. George's Hospital was so set up, and though almost every window-head was repaired after being broken, almost every one of them still shews marks of fracture.

We have come to the resolution of never recommending the purchase or leasehold tenure of any building so faulty, unless the offending work be taken from over every aperture, and proper arches be substituted, or unless a sufficient cambered iron bar be placed under the soffit of each aperture. The expense of constant external repairs, the in-